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SUBJECT: VIEWS FROM SWISS AMBASSADOR TO IRAN

Classified By: Ambassador Wolff, For Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Swiss Ambassador to Iran, Livia Leu, shared with Ambassador Wolff her views on the fate of two U.S. citizens in Iran, Iran's position in the UN, its upcoming elections in June, and her assessment on how best to approach the issue of rapprochement. Leu judged that Iran's position at the UN in New York was carefully managed and did not deviate from Tehran's official line. She also noted that Iran's Ambassador to the UN, Mohammad Khazaei, was a better representation of Iran's official position than his predecessor, Javad Zarif. Leu said President Ahmadinejad would likely win the election and assessed that former reformist President Mohammad Khatami, who dropped out of the race, would have stood a better chance of defeating Ahmadinejad than the current opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi. Leu said both the U.S. and Iran are sending mixed messages to each other, and she advised that the best way forward would be to establish a bilateral framework to begin negotiations. End summary.

12. (C) Ambassador Wolff on April 22 met with the Swiss Ambassador to Iran Livia Leu and Swiss Permanent Representative to the UN Peter Maurer to discuss Iran. Leu opened by saying she had no information on the whereabouts of Robert Levinson, the U.S. citizen who disappeared in Iran in 2007, despite her repeated attempts to discuss this issue with numerous Iranian government officials. She said she found credible the Iranian government's claims that it had no information. With regard to jailed journalist Roxana Saberi, Leu said she does not know any details of what Saberi allegedly did or the reasons behind the government's harsh sentencing of her. Ambassador Wolff queried if her arrest was a manifestation of an internal political struggle. Leu said perhaps some hard-line conservatives wanted to send a message and scuttle the potential for U.S.-Iranian rapprochement or others perhaps wanted to use her arrest as a bargaining chip. Nonetheless, she said all indications showed that the government is looking for a way to lower the profile of this issue. She said Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Shahrudi told her that he hoped for a quick resolution to Saberi's case.

13. (C) Before arriving at USUN, Leu said she had met with Iranian Ambassador to the UN Mohammad Khazaei and judged that Iran's position at the UN in New York was carefully managed and did not deviate from Tehran's official line. She said the Supreme Leader is aware of any deviations from official policy. In comparison with his predecessor Javad Zarif, Leu said Khazaei better reflects the official policy of the Iranian government, despite Zarif's greater experience in appealing to Western audiences. She said Khazaei claimed that 90 percent of his job directly relates to dealing with the U.S. Senate and Congress on issues unrelated to the UN.

14. (C) Leu said President Ahmadinejad would likely win the election and assessed that former reformist President Mohammad Khatami, who dropped out of the race in March, would have stood a better chance of defeating President Ahmadinejad

than the current opposition candidate Mir-Hosein Mousavi. She said Mousavi is campaigning on issues such as broadening personal liberties, which might have some resonance during the elections. Ambassador Wolff asked if Iranians are aware of how damaging Ahmadinejad is to their public image overseas. Leu said there is a lively debate on this issue in Iran, but that those who are most critical of him typically do not vote.

15. (C) The discussion on how best to approach U.S.-Iranian rapprochement yielded Leu's most analytical assessment. Leu said both the U.S. and Iran are sending mixed messages to each other. Rather than sending messages via the press or other venues, she advised that the best way forward would be to establish a bilateral framework to begin negotiations. She said Iran will be reluctant to enter negotiations with the U.S. as long as no formal framework exists. Iran can easily avoid and deny informal, ad hoc exchanges, which it would be reluctant to do with a formal framework. Leu said the U.S. and Iran need to begin with small steps such as establishing direct air links or working to settle the issue of the arrests of Roxana Saberi and the Iranian government officials arrested in Irbil, Iraq in 2006. Leu indicated that Khazaei has already stated that Iran will publish more of its grievances against the U.S. before any negotiations begin. Ambassador Wolff emphasized that Iran must understand that our offer is serious and credible and that the U.S. expects a serious response from the Iranians.

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